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ABSTRACT

In 1993, New York City tried a different way of changing failing schools. A large failing high school was closed, and in its place were created four small high schools, a small elementary school, an infant and toddler program, a day care center for children of adolescent parents, and a medical clinic. Over a period of 3 or 4 years the building was emptied; the students who were there as first-year students stayed on until they graduated, but there were no new-entry students into that high school. The students who would have gone to that school went to the new schools. Initially, the new schools were not located in the big building. In time the large building was redesigned to house all the new schools and programs. The schools within the building are totally autonomous: they have their own curriculum, student body, parent group, faculty, and mission. A building council decides how to share certain common resources and draw on some of the benefits of numbers without experiencing the disadvantages of large schools. Students are exposed to adult conversation, mixed-aged grouping is utilized, and teachers are allowed to figure out what works. Pedagogy relies on conversation and seminars instead of conventional lectures. Twice a year there are projects involving all staff and students, and on certain days, students visit universities. Students learn to research and analyze issues and write papers on any subject. Ninety-four percent of students go on to college. Appendices present the principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools, the Center for Collaborative Education, and Human Scale Education. (TD)

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ED 464 790

CREATING A CAMPUS FOR SMALL SCHOOLS

New York City's answer to failing high schools

A SEMINAR WITH

ANN COOK

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Human Scale Education

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Introduction

Colin Hodgetts

The amount of interest shown in the seminar with Ann Cook that *Human Scale Education (HSE)* organised in December 1995 at the Institute of Education, London, took everyone at *HSE* slightly by surprise. Recent attention to violence in some of our schools must have encouraged those attending to investigate one of the ways in which the New York school system is tackling the problem. Since the seminar, there have been further horrific acts of violence and vandalism in our schools, putting violence high on the list of serious issues that must be tackled if our young people are to get a decent education. The size of school is, in my view and *HSE*'s, possibly the most significant causal factor, large scale institutions making it easier for violence to flourish.

Fritz Schumacher, who wrote *Small is Beautiful*, drew attention to the relationship between size and violence. If you want to reduce the violence in our schools the first thing to explore is a reduction in size, both of institution and of class.

When working for the *Save the Children Fund*'s Vietnamese resettlement programme in the UK I foresaw that any large camps would face problems of violence - as did happen at those established in the South coast by the *British Refugee Council* - and at *SCF* we chose to set up a network of 14 small reception centres. Our operation cost less than *BRC*'s, we had fewer violent incidents, we could address the refugees' settlement problems better because we had more social workers and less administrators and we had less trouble closing our centres. My later experience in the 80s as headteacher of the *Small School of Hartland* has confirmed my belief that what I had learned about the importance of small scale is equally applicable to the education system.

***Human Scale Education*, with which I have been involved from the start, has been trying to promote small scale, both by helping establish small schools and by encouraging the breaking down of large schools into smaller units. There is some history of the latter in this country. Madeley Court, Stantonbury Campus and Countesthorpe offer interesting case studies.**

It is at present government policy in this country that if a large school is failing it ought to be closed. The American experience of this approach is that you can reopen it and find that nothing has changed, except the look of the pupils within it! You are still faced with many of the same problems. So we are interested in looking at much more radical ways of restructuring to ensure that when a school reopens it is something quite different.

During the summer of 1995 I had the opportunity to visit *The Urban Academy* (*UA*) in New York. There Ann Cook introduced me to their innovative approach to the restructuring of failing schools. I saw a solution that could bring together the two prongs of *HSE*'s programme for the reform of secondary schooling, the establishment of both small schools and and the restructuring of large schools into several mini-schools.

Let me describe briefly my experience at *UA*. I met with Ann Cook in the teachers' room. We sat round her desk, an island in a sea of office desks, one for each of the staff, that have replaced the heavily carved, iron-legged, bolted-to-the-floor veterans that until a few months before filled this large classroom and gave support to students attending this Manhattan brick pile, also known as the *Julia Richman High School*. The *Urban Academy* is one of six autonomous schools/projects that occupy the premises of the former *Julia Richman High School*, which was a school of some 2500 students but now is closed.

Though the neighbourhood is recently gentrified, the students at *Julia Richman High School* did not come from the neighbourhood. The last of them, for the school has been emptied a year at a time, still had to be scanned for weapons to gain entry. School violence, and in particular the shooting of two students in a New York high school, provided the impetus for radical school initiatives.

Linda Darling-Hammond of *NCREST* (the *National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools and Teaching*), which is monitoring new initiatives in American high schools, told me that closing a school and reopening it as six projects is much more successful than trying to turn it round. She writes that the *Urban Academy*'s story 'illustrates the consistent findings of recent research showing that smaller schools that are organised to provide continuous relationships among adults and young people and that focus on meaningful and challenging kinds of learning are more successful at motivating, engaging and graduating students and thus ensuring their later success'.

As Ann and I talked, students wandered through the office, some stopping at desks for a chat with a teacher. This is the one route to their common room, which is intentional. Students need to know how schools and teachers really work, they need to feel the buzz. To create a community between adults and kids everything has to be open and shared. There is no place for a staffroom in such a school. School must be personal before it can be educational, this is the message. And it must be caring.

Jacqueline Ancess, who reported on the *Academy* for *NCREST*, says that most of the students have fallen through cracks in the system elsewhere. Caring is about filling in the cracks. Kids told her: 'If I need to get up early, they'll call me.' '*Urban* doesn't only respond to your educational needs but all your needs.' 'They practise what they preach.' 'Teachers know you and you know them.' 'It's a little support system.' 'A lot of it is size.' '*Urban* took over where my parents left off when they died. They made sure I got my Social Security check and knew my tenant rights. They even found me a job.'

'When a student who is homeless arrives at school still distraught and despondent about the previous night's events, *UA* faculty will cover the class of the student's advisor, freeing him or her to comfort and stabilise the youngster so that he or she can refocus on learning. *UA*'s willingness and capacity to resolve tensions between the needs of the school and the needs of individuals in favour of the individual increase the likelihood that vulnerable students will survive and flourish.' (Ancess)

A different kind of school requires a different kind of teacher. The *Urban Academy* developed ten years ago out of a training programme for teachers. As will already be clear, there the teacher must relate to the whole of a student's life and be advocate, mentor, mediator, counsellor and even 'parent'. The teacher is seen as a generalist first and a specialist second, one of the nine principles to which all members of the *Coalition of Essential Schools* are expected to subscribe. At *UA* teachers regulate teaching and the programme is built around teachers' expertise and interest. Se we build professional development into the school schedule once a week and after school twice a month.

School size is important for creating a caring community. *UA* chooses to be small [about 110 students] so that it can create a personal, intimate environment in which all of the students can know one another and all of the staff. 'Regular interaction with the same group of adults allows students to bring more problems to the surface.'

If the key word for teachers is 'caring' that for students is 'choosing'. They are expected to choose to attend this particular school, but they are also chosen. The 'assessment process is used not to screen students but to ensure a range of intellectual ability in the school and to

ensure that the school's mission is well suited to the applicant's needs'. This could make it elitist. The reality is that almost all the students have histories of 'long-term absences, cutting, school phobia and serious anti-social behaviour such as use of weapons and fighting'. The opportunity to choose helps with motivation. Students choose their courses and devise an educational plan with short and long-term goals and ways of evaluating their progress towards them.

A teacher at *Vanguard* high school, another small school on the *Julia Richman* campus, told a reporter from *Education Week* about the changes in behaviour that he had seen in pupils from the usual defensive stance they take when they first walk in. 'At first they think that everyone is out to get them so they put up a tough look and stance. Then they slowly realise: "Hey, this is a different kind of place. I don't have to put on my tough guy look."'

Nancy Jachim of *UA* recognises that students want to be loved, to be beautiful and attractive. 'They are slouching towards success... not pursuing it ardently.' Nevertheless 'believing in the students, especially when they do not believe in themselves' pays handsome academic dividends. Over 90% of students graduate and 95% of graduates continue on to post-secondary education.

So if we go to the enormous trouble of closing large, failing, usually inner-city, schools perhaps we should consider seriously the possibility of reopening them not as another large school but as a campus of autonomous small schools. That would give choice and diversity to the neighbourhood.

I came back very excited from my visit to Ann's school and felt that what she had to say would be of great importance to those of us in the UK who are struggling with some of these ideas and issues.

Ann is not a stranger to this country. She taught for a year in London at *Islington Green*. She has spent most of her professional life in teacher training and support in a number of projects. In fact, the *Urban Academy* grew out of a teacher training programme because the teachers realised that the new things they were involved in were not possible in the structures within which they were having to teach. 'Why don't we start a new school?' they asked. Thus the *Urban Academy* was born. I think this is extremely important. It is time that teachers got back into taking the lead in education. So it is also very important to hear of an experiment that has been teacher-led and came out of a teacher training programme.

NOTE: Spoken and written styles of language differ. I have taken the liberty of converting the one into the other whilst trying to retain something of the flavour of a public address. Ann's talk was followed by a lively discussion and question-and-answer session. I have omitted the questions and inserted her answers into the text of her talk.

February 1997

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An Inquiry High School: Learner-centered Accountability at the Urban Academy, Jacqueline Ancess, NCREST 1995

Thinking Small, Ann Bradley, *Education Week* 22.3.95

The *Coalition of Essential Schools* is a high school/university partnership that works across the USA to redesign the American high school for better student learning and achievement. It was

founded in 1994 at Brown University, Road Island, by Theodore R. Sizer, Professor of Education at Brown and formerly Dean of the Harvard Graduate School of Education. The Coalition's nine principles are in Appendix 1. Address: CES, Box 1969, Brown University, Providence. R10291211. Tel: 401 863 3384

The *Center for Collaborative Education* is the New York affiliate of the CES. It persuaded the New York Board of Education to support the *Julia Richman* project. The twelve principles of the Center are in Appendix 2.

Ann Cook's Address

The business of sharing ideas across the Atlantic is not without its dangers. Not too long ago our papers in the States carried a story that Prince Charles was very concerned about America's corrupting influence on the English language! Before we look at other specific corruptions, I want personally to pay tribute to some British contributions to American education. Speaking to friends here, I think they have forgotten what we owe you. There was a time in the 60s and 70s when English primary education, as documented by Plowden, was a runaway favourite in the States. Americans could not get enough of it. Dozens of your educators went on to the American workshop circuit to teach us about open classrooms, the teacher aspect of headteachers, about teacher centres, advisors and school council programmes like *Breakthrough to Literacy* and Laurie Stenhouse's *Humanities Curriculum Project,* of which I was a member. We were very eager learners.

Now, some of my friends back in the States have suggested that I shouldn't dredge up this history because we bungled a lot of those efforts and we have lumbered you with some of our practices: for example, instead of child-centred programmes we have exported our obsession with testing, instead of nurturing educational environments we have promoted gigantic institutions modelled on the American factory, instead of professional development we in America enthuse about teacher-proof curriculum materials. We are toying with vouchers and contracting with private firms to run our public schools, though some of you may have read that the experiment in Baltimore has, mercifully, failed.

We have spent millions of dollars on state and national curriculum frameworks that are written in our odd jargon, which always begins with 'All students will...' Here's one taken from the New York State Curriculum Guidelines : 'By tenth grade (that is 15 or 16) all students will understand and cope with death and dying....By tenth grade all students will know how to re-establish, maintain and end relationships' and finally...'By tenth grade all students will demonstrate an understanding of disease and disorders and take action to control, prevent or limit and treat their development'.

I know some of us tend to be pretty critical of our own system, but I don't want to let you all off the hook entirely. We were not alone in legitimising such nonsense. For eight years, at least, our two countries had more in common than many of us are happy to acknowledge. We had, during the Reagan-Thatcher years, a disturbing, mean-spirited alliance. Using the banner of so-called 'reform', both our countries were treated to a heavy dose of 'back to basics', educational market forces, privatisation, so-called choice and a rush to standardisation under the rubric of raising standards and heightening expectations. I would argue that, in place of educational leadership, we got compacts and contracts, simplistic solutions to complex problems, ostrich-like cowardice when it came to such things as adolescent sexuality and a misunderstanding about the fundamental role of public state education in a democracy. This has led to a disturbing erosion of public confidence in state education, coupled with drastic reductions in funding, both here and in our country.

Now, just for the record, as some of America's worst excesses made their way across the Atlantic, some of us did say something and did protest. When a delegation toured the States a while back, the English drew attention to America's apparent addiction to testing, some expressing an interest in it. 'Don't do it!', we said. Accountability harnessed to endless testing will fail. What's more, it will divert valuable resources, time and energy. It will send the wrong messages about what's important and it won't produce better teaching or smarter

kids. I hope all of this sounds foreign to you here, though reading recent issues of *TES* I'm not so sure.

Another American export has had to do with scale. For years, we in our country built our schools to hold more children - sometimes as many as 8000. This was America; bigger was better - more democratic, more economic. We consolidated small schools to make large schools. We linked pay packets to square footage, heads' salaries to enrolment. We encouraged successful schools to expand, even when expansion placed the basis of their success in jeopardy. Our large schools made it possible to ignore the human factor and made it harder and harder for those in schools to feel responsible for their pupils. There are schools in New York today with 11 deputy heads, more than a few deans, attendance officers and secretaries. Few, if any, of these people ever see kids and, when they do, their picture is skewed since most of those they do see are kids in trouble.

Size and Reform

Significantly it was the issue of school size that launched many of us in America into the reform movement. During the 70s and 80s 'alternative' schools, as they were called then, became popular as dumping grounds for problem kids - dropouts of the large secondary schools. For a long time these schools simply coexisted as poor relations alongside the bigger institutions. Then a curious thing happened. People began to notice that some of the alternative schools were having a good deal of success with students who were considered difficult, alienated or just plain bored. When finally control, even violence, became a number one issue at the large schools, someone at the Central Office finally read the research and took notice. Students - teachers too - the research said, need a sense of community. They need to feel connected with peers and with colleagues. Small schools seemed in a better position to create that sense of community and to shape it to create an intellectual culture. As one student noted, 'School must be personal before it can be educational'. Big schools protect bad habits.

To change the way people think and talk about kids and about education, those involved in the day-to-day life of the school have to play a central role in formulating policy They must accept that they are accountable to one another for creating a culture in the school.

An example. We know that young people who have had little exposure to diversity are suspicious of kids who look or talk differently from themselves. Large schools make it difficult to get beyond those differences, to establish trust or provide room for honest disagreement. As one of the students in our school said when asked what it was like to go to a small school with a diverse population : 'When I first got here, I was a little racist, I'm not going to lie. But when I got to know people outside my race it made me change my attitude of not liking everybody from that race. It made me realise that I cannot judge one person on the basis of someone else. You need other experiences to learn about individuals and that's what happened here for me. Coming here taught me to consider people more as individuals.' Clearly, one cannot mandate what matters in schools but one can create an environment that encourages and supports such experiences.

The staff at *Urban Academy,* which is my school, believes that organising a school for success and the prevention of failure means struggling to make all of its components - curriculum, pedagogy, schedule and programme structure - work together to create an institutional and professional climate and culture in which human beings both are, and feel, valued and in which human beings can achieve fulfilment through their work and their relationships. It means organising around the needs and interests of teachers as well as kids. It means releasing teachers to achieve the idiosyncratic student-teacher triangle that Ted Sizer

identifies as the crux of effective education: 'the movement is first and foremost a movement in *pedagogy*, in the relationship between teacher, student and the subjects of study that bring them together. For example, the aphorism student-as-worker/teacher-as-coach affects everything.' [Theodore R. Sizer, *Diverse Practice, Shared Ideas: The Essential School*, a pamphlet issued by the Coalition of Essential Schools.] This means re-conceptualising teachers' roles and teaching work. Limiting the size of the school community makes this possible.

New York Innovations

I say all this about small schools as a backdrop to a major initiative now underway in New York City. Probably nowhere in the country is there as much energy and innovation in public schools as in New York right now. Over the past ten years, and even more rapidly in the last three or four, dozens of new small schools have opened - fifty since 1992. To start small schools, however, is one thing. To change large, failing schools is something else. On this score, some of us noticed some trends. We noticed, for example, that you can build a successful school from scratch. We noticed that big schools needed to be closed for a while to reorientate people's attitudes about that school. We also noticed that trying to start schools within schools sometimes proved more difficult and often failed to produce good results.

We put those pieces together and in 1993 proposed to the *New York City Board of Education* a different way of trying to change failing schools. When I say 'we' I mean the *Centre for Collaborative Education* (the New York City affiliate of the *Coalition for Essential Schools*) which is an umbrella organisation of about forty-five schools, some secondary, some elementary, some junior high. All the successful schools in *CCE* were small and had worked for a long time helping and supporting new schools.

What we proposed to the Board was that they close a school, a large failing high school, that in its place we would create six new small schools and that the students who would normally have gone to that large failing school would be given a choice to go to one of these six new schools. Over a period of three or four years the school building itself would be emptied, the students who were there as first years would stay on until they graduated, but there would be no new entry students into that high school. The students who would have gone to that school would now go to these new schools. The new schools were not to be relocated, initially, back in the big building because we had learned that that did not work very well. Rather, we were going to find spaces in elementary schools, junior high schools, or even leased office space, and would set up those six new schools in those other buildings.

New York has had a history of shutting schools. It is not a new thing. What was new here was our proposal to shut the schools but keep the same kids. You can shut schools and turn them around by bringing in new kids because 'good kids make good schools'. That's a sort of favourite trick of the administration. What we said was that we are committed to serving those youngsters that were formerly going to the school that was failing and to give them a shot at a different kind of school. In time we would also redesign the large building into an educational complex.

Response to Violence

The Board of Education, I think, would have gone on being somewhat reluctant to support this effort had not a couple of things happened. One was an increase in violence in large schools despite the scanners, the extra security guards and the extra police. In fact, the most

tragic incident occurred in *Jefferson High School* on a day when the Mayor, with all his own extra security measures, was visiting the school. The shootings within the school that day took place despite the scanners: the kids smuggled weapons past them.

There had also been an increasing amount of research showing the success of our smaller schools. We were graduating students at a rate far higher than these students would have been accustomed to in their previous schools.

Unsatisfactory Solutions and an Alternative

When big schools begin to show signs of stress the system normally puts more programmes into those buildings. Money is found to provide various kinds of auxiliary services: social services, after-school services, new educational programmes, nursing programmes, performing arts programmes etc. However it was becoming clearer and clearer that these particular programmes did not turn the school around. Because of this, and probably also because there was a new Chancellor who saw an opportunity to put his mark on the system, the system bought the idea of selecting a school and trying to change it in the way that we proposed.

We proposed that a failing school be selected. We did not want to get involved in the decision about which school it was. The Board chose a school called *Julia Richman.* All the indicators were that it was a failing school. There were severe attendance problems. On any given day, between 60% and 75% of the kids were there, so 25-40% were not. The school would have had a normal intake in the first year of about 7-800 kids. Four years later, which would have been the normal time for kids to finish high school, around 150 were left, roughly 22%.

This school chosen by the Board is located on East 67th Street, between First and Second Avenue. It is, without question, the highest priced neighbourhood in the City of New York. Probably one of the highest priced neighbourhoods in the country. The school was built in 1923. At the very beginning it was an elite girls' school. Down through the years it changed and from the 50s on it did not attract youngsters from the neighbourhood. So the youngsters who came into the school were from other districts and from other parts of the city. The number of incidents in the building was enormous. There were problems around the neighbourhood, with kids taking things from local shops. A large college nearby reported problems. At a subway station down the street they had to put in extra police. Things were out of control. The police presence barely held it from becoming even worse. So when the Board selected this school it had a lot of data which became important when other communities wanting schools in their neighbourhoods closed asked why they chose this one.

What happened to *Julia Rickman*'s kids? Some of them transferred but a lot of them left the system. There was also an enormous amount of friction inside the building itself. It is located in a neighbourhood which, unlike for a lot of our schools, did not present a problem to the school. Usually, the idea of having security guards in a building has a lot to do with their location. The guards are not there to control within but to try to prevent intrusion from without. At *Julia Richman* the situation was the reverse.

The plan

The Board agreed to hothouse six new small schools. For our part, as the organisation promoting this idea, we guaranteed that we would try to raise some outside funding to

appoint project directors for the six new schools before there were actually kids in them, so as to start the planning process. We raised the money to do that.

Then the issue became: what goes back into that large school? This is a school that takes up an entire city block. It has five storeys on one side with an annexe of six floors. It has two gymnasia, a swimming pool, an auditorium that holds about 1500, a library and very large corridors. So the question was: what to do with the building?

The *Centre for Collaborative Education* proposed to the Board that we do not put back 2000 or 2400 or 2800 adolescents. We felt that even if the schools were small that went back into that building, to put only adolescents into it would be asking for trouble. We proposed the following: that we put back four small, high schools (none of them over 300) and that we put in an elementary school of 300, an infant and toddler programme and a day care centre which will serve the children of adolescent parents. We have about 35 school-based day care centres in New York city that are for the children of teenage parents. Thus, in theory, a baby could start at three months in our infant and toddler programme and continue up through the system in one building.

We also proposed a transitional programme because we wanted to establish links with the institutions of higher education that would allow secondary students to take college-level courses when the school they were in thought they were ready to do that.

We wanted to put in a medical clinic because a lot of these students have severe medical problems which do not get adequately dealt with in their communities. The incidence of asthma, for instance, is very high. We wanted to have a clinic on site and we also wanted a professional development centre, similar to your teacher centres, housed in the complex. The Board accepted this.

We are now in the middle of the first full year of some of these programmes coming into the building. The *Urban Academy* which is a ten-year-old school, was asked to go in as the anchor school to provide experience, and my co-director, Herb Mack, is the building manager. Two of the new schools to go into the building are *Vanguard* and *Manhattan International*, a school taking on mostly immigrant kids who have been in the country for four years or less. There are about twenty five languages spoken in that school. There is also a performing arts school called *Talent Unlimited.* Those four high schools are in the building now. In February we are starting construction on the infant-toddler programme and hopefully by May the kids will be in - certainly by September. Elementary school will start in September '96 in space which is now being used by the senior class of *Julia Richman.* We are now in the process of creating the teacher centre. (Ed.Note: The Elementary School is now in position and the infant-toddler programme is underway.)

Current Issues: 1. Scanners

The first thing that happened was an argument about scanners, because there were scanners on the doors similar to airport security scanners. The new schools that went into the building wanted the scanners taken out. We felt we could control the security. We also felt that scanners sent a very poor and wrong message to the kids. Some of us would have refused to work in the building if the scanners had remained. It became a very tricky issue, partly because when you have scanners in schools in New York you have six extra security guards. Would they be redeployed? Fortunately for us, other schools needed them. Since we removed the scanners we have spent a lot of time working with security guards conditioned by the way the school used to be. A lot of discussion has gone on and the jury is still out.

2. Changing Perceptions

The hope is that this project will provide a new way of looking at failing schools so as to bring about fundamental change. I think that the biggest problem we face is that the central administration is still looking at these schools as though they were big schools. That presents some issues that we have to play with in order to help the Central Board begin to relate to the new structure.

3. The Building Manager

This is an entirely new idea. The concept of a building manager is unheard of in New York. The building manager brings all the directors together into a Building Council. The schools within the building are totally autonomous: they have their own curriculum, their own student body, their own parent group, their own faculty, their own mission. However, we are in a building that shares certain common resources and, in order for us to work together, we have done some things in the building to try to support both interdependence and autonomy.

4. Territory

One example is that we are trying to make sure that no students from one school have to travel through the space of another to get anywhere. This is very tricky but very important. It means that if you, a teacher, see some youngsters in your hall and you do not recognise them you know they do not belong there. If you had a traffic pattern that allowed kids to travel back and forth, then maybe any youngsters you saw would have a right to be there - you would have no idea. We wanted to prevent that. All the youngsters in a particular part of the building should be known to the faculty of that particular school. That has taken a lot of playing around with entrances and exits and traffic patterns to the gymnasium, for instance.

5. Shared Space and Activities

We had lots of meetings where we scheduled common facilities. The Building Council, which is chaired by the building manager, meets regularly to figure out how to share the gym, the locker rooms, the auditorium, the lunch room and so on. We have also gone a step further and tried to anticipate that, if you have individual, autonomous schools sharing a large space, kids will develop a school spirit about their own school. We want this to happen but we do not want it to occur in a way that is confrontational between schools. So building-wide teams drawn from all the schools in the complex represent the *Julia Richman Education Complex* in the public school Athletic League.

As I mentioned before, there are huge corridors with large bulletin board spaces, so we have created mural parties made up of a mix of kids from the different schools. One of the virtues of a large building in which there are several small schools is that it makes possible activities such as a choir which can draw kids from across the schools. That is one advantage of being in a large building with autonomous schools - we can draw on some of the benefits of numbers without experiencing many of the disadvantages of large schools.

These are examples of how we can build relationships across schools without necessarily tampering with the autonomy of individual schools. How well this will succeed, I do not know. We are reasonably satisfied with where we are right now. If I were to come back to you in a year, I might have a whole different scenario. Right now, I find it a very interesting idea, workable for other schools, provided certain conditions are met. One condition is that the autonomy of each of the schools is clearly established and that those schools are no bigger than 300.

Creating a School Culture

The kids we get very often come from situations in which they weren't successful. For them school was really a kind of social activity, if it was that. A lot of our students would not have come to our school with the sort of view that a lot of middle class kids have: 'I know why I am here - it is a meal ticket to something else.' When they come to us a lot of our students don't have long-term views about college or university and yet the *Urban Academy* is unashamedly post-secondary education oriented. So we do a number of things to rectify this mismatch. Some of them we don't even do consciously.

One of the major features of the school is the office. Teachers do not have their own room . Everybody has a desk in one enormous room. We have also put some student lockers in it. It's the place where the phones and the Xerox machine are. There's traffic through all the time. Your desk is next to another teacher's, so there is a tremendous amount of adult conversation. I personally think that one of the things that we have lost sight of in schools is that kids need to hear, be around and have normal conversations with adults. We want youngsters to develop skills of discussion. Where are they supposed to learn these skills? They need to hear adults talk to one another. This is important, particularly for our population, as a lot of our kids don't have that at home. I don't think it's a class issue. There are a lot of middle class kids who don't hear good conversation at home either. As teachers' conversations are, for the most part, not private, students hear adults laughing and kidding around and being serious and they see the day-to-day life of a school. It's unpacked for them - it's not a mystery. They see teachers looking in books. They hear people talking about ideas.

Our high school classes are multi-aged. This is partly because we don't have a choice, partly because we think it has real advantages. The older kids introduce new students to the culture of the school and they do it in the classes which they share with the younger kids. The exceptions are when tackling things like calculus, which requires a knowledge of trigonometry, or a foreign language. Then we have students who are at more or less the same skill level. Vertical grouping, or mixed grouping, or mixed-age grouping, or whatever term you want to use, is a very effective way of organising schools.

Specialist Teachers and School Size

The idea of the Comprehensive High School was very attractive and one that James Conant pushed. He believed that you couldn't provide breadth without size. I think that this is predicated on the notion that a teacher only teaches one particular subject. I don't mean to suggest that teachers should be generalists, but they can be specialists in more than one subject. In our school, for example, we have a full and very rich curriculum. I would say that, if we were to compare the kind of curriculum that we have at the *Urban Academy* to a very large comprehensive school in New York (and I would pick one like the *Bronx High School of Science,* which is a selective entry school), we offer as rich - I would say richer - curriculum because we focus on what we are trying to get kids to learn from those particular

subjects. For example, in history or in social studies we are very interested in historiography, an approach that goes through all the social sciences classes that are involved with historical topics.

If a teacher wants to offer a very focused class on the Reconstruction period in American history he or she would be looking at primary source materials. Teachers would most likely be using documents and archives, not textbooks; they would have students working in libraries. Youngsters might not know about the war of 1812 but they would get to know a tremendous amount about the documents and evidence relating to particular historical issues they are studying. Later they would be able to take that information and that approach and apply it to another period of history. Teachers are interested in teaching what they know about, not only what they are licensed in. We do not ask people to teach something they don't know anything about. The fact that 94% of our kids go on to university - and stay there and do very well - is evidence of the success of our approach. I think the reason they do well is that they have learned how to write a paper in any subject. They have learned how to approach analysis - literary and historical - and how to focus on scientific experiments through approaching things in a scientific way.

Cross-Curricular Teaching

Sizer, founder of the *Coalition for Essential Schools,* has proposed that there be maths/science/humanities links. That is OK if the faculty comes to it as their way of working. I think internal organisation is something that the faculty has to decide upon. They must make sure that the kids are getting a rigorous intellectual experience. At the *Urban Academy* we have teachers who have backgrounds in science, maths, social studies, geography, language and so on. We ask them: 'What is it you want to teach?' They are very keen to teach what in American high schools you would tend to find in elective courses in the junior and senior years, that is focused courses that tend to go into detail and depth but don't necessarily cover as much territory. In our school we tend to arrive at integration through skills rather than through content.

One of the courses that I teach periodically is a course on the history of the Civil Rights Movement. In order for kids to understand that period of history you really need to go back to establish links with the Reconstruction period. There is no way you can talk about the American Civil Rights movement without knowing something about the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments to the Constitution. Some kids in my class would know nothing about that, so I have to decide how much to cover. But I know that, when I finish with that class, the kids have a real sense of historical material and they know how to go about framing questions and trying to find answers to the important questions. This, I think, is what teaching is all about. I can't teach them about every single historical topic.

We are all concerned about writing. We want kids to leave us able to prepare a research paper: to write one that is coherent, that shows some evidence of analysis, that shows that kids can go to source material, make use of those sources and argue from evidence. So we would not tend to go for what we call core curriculum mandated from above. We need top-down-support for bottom-up-reform. People who are at the bottom - that's us folks, the practitioners - need to figure out what works in our particular setting, with the teachers and the students that we have. I would argue that such an approach is more successful and gives professionalism to the staff. We underestimate and ask too little from teachers and we give them too little to work with. We take too much responsibility away from them.

Effective Leadership

Effective leadership makes a huge difference to institutions of any size. But that's not the only thing that makes a difference. I know of schools in New York that have extremely effective, sophisticated, articulate, clear-headed, energetic, well-trained heads and their schools are not very good. The reason is that the schools are very big and, despite the fact that these heads can put in place certain practices, they can't pull the whole institution along with them. It is very, very tough and exhausting. I think you need effective leadership, but you maximise the impact of effective leadership if you have a unit size that is small enough so that the staff can really play their part.

One of the features of small schools is that the staff feel very empowered and believe they make a difference. They take on additional responsibilities, which has been a big issue with the union. This project was supported by the United Federation of Teachers, a stronger union than the NUT, which agreed to the shutting down of *Julia Richman High School*. They saw, in schools that were really working, that teachers were taking on more and more responsibility, that they were having a very interesting time professionally and that they felt much more committed and empowered. That made the leadership at those schools even more effective. If you have a leader who is fairly ineffective, even small schools probably won't be too terrific. Small is necessary but not sufficient. Small size doesn't take the place of attention to pedagogy. My big complaint about some of the reforms is that they tend to be government-based or structurally oriented and don't pay enough attention to what you do when you have a small school.

Pedagogy and Behaviour

What do you do in the classes in a small school? You can have a small 'big' school, that is a small school that works exactly like a big school - a real mistake. There has been a lot of research on adolescent behaviour but most descriptions are based on observing youngsters in particular settings. If you change the setting very dramatically you can also change the behaviour.

We have in our school a lot of youngsters who come from large schools. They have come to us because they have been in some difficulty. They have had weapons. They have been in fights. At our school we have never had a weapon or a serious fight in ten years. We have stopped situations which we think are going to lead to a fight. Kids will come and say to us: 'Something's going on over there. So-and-so is not happy' and we will move fast. But the difference also has to do with the pedagogy in our school. I think this is something that isn't focused on nearly enough.

Our school relies on conversation and seminars. No teacher in the school would lecture conventionally. It would be very rare to walk into a room and see a teacher up at the front of the class. It happens occasionally but it is not the preferred mode of instruction. The preferred mode of instruction is discussion. The issues we tend to address in our classes are those to which there are no real answers. For instance 'What were the causes of the Civil War?' Historians argue about this and write whole books arguing it.

Twice a year we have an all-school project involving the whole faculty - all the staff and all the students. A couple of weeks before the term begins teachers choose a question on which to focus. We try to figure out interesting small group topics around which people can go off in different directions. The project must be enjoyable and must get kids out in the city to use its resources and allow us to mix new students with old students. Over the years we have done

projects around 'What is a good Museum?; 'What is the impact of architecture on the way people live?'; 'What is the effect of television on American society?' None of these are questions that have simple answers. Then we try to divide down. With the museum project, for example, one group looked at the whole issue of censorship in museums. What should be in museums? What about the Elgin Marbles or Native American artefacts - should they be in museums? There was a tremendous richness to the topic. We pulled in experts from the museums, consultants, people who had done curating and so on. We always team up new teachers with senior teachers. Through experiences like that, kids learn what the ethos of the school is: it is about asking questions, about finding evidence. It is about developing a point of view based on evidence and not just off the top of your head. It is about learning how to have an intelligent conversation, dialogue or discussion with a group of your peers.

We also do narrative reports about the students. The students get a good deal of feedback on their writing. Twice a year students have formal conferences with faculty. We also make a big deal out of College Day. Twice a year the whole school divides into small groups and we visit different universities, not because we think that a particular student should go to this or that university, but because we want them to see, over the course of time, that there are a number of different educational settings and that they may find one comfortable. Funny things happen - there are always unintended results. For example, we thought that if we made a big deal out of College Day the kids would come back and say: 'Yes, now I know I've got to work really hard to have these wonderful opportunities'. One year they said they had had such a good time that they were all going to take an exam that bypasses the High School Diploma. They were going to take it, get out of school and go straight to college because it's so much fun!

Kids, too, get very passionate about their points of view. One of the rules in the school - probably the most critical rule - is that you can attack somebody's ideas but you cannot attack them personally. That is something that the older kids teach the younger kids. That is part of the culture of the school and is one of the reasons why kids from very diverse backgrounds get a very different sense of themselves and of other kids. They can't sit in a room and not know what the kid next to them thinks. In every class they know what their peers think about a lot of issues. That can lead to terrible problems but it can also lead to people having respect for one another. I think that many of these matters are linked and yet they are not referred to very often when talking about school reform.

The Future

Political forces are very powerful. We are at a crossroads in the United States in terms of public, state education. There seems to be a tremendous amount of interest in undermining a lot of what is best about public education. There is a lack of understanding about the importance of public education in a democracy. We are treading on very dangerous territory. We are talking in the States about vouchers. I have a lot of problems with them, because vouchers don't guarantee additional spaces and they don't guarantee quality.

I always thought of Britain as being a more child-centred society than America. America is almost certainly not a child-centred society. I think that a lot of the issues that we are seeing being played out in this Republican Congress and around the budget are very frightening.

It is crucial to keep repeating to people who say that things are failing: 'Doing what we have been doing has gotten us where we are'. Certainly in the States the professional educators have been largely responsible for creating the kind of demands for basics and for tradition and for the most narrow kinds of educational achievement scales. To give you one example, back in the 60s a number of us working in inner cities could not establish that kids of colour

who went to schools where they were in the majority were getting an inferior education. Neither press nor public would accept it but we could see it from being in the schools. We could see it in terms of resources, we could see it in terms of library books but we could not prove conclusively that those kids were doing less well. Finally parents went into the schools and took away the standardised reading tests. Nobody had paid any attention to those tests before that. Those tests were published and became the basis of two national civil rights reports. They became the measure of school success.

Now in 1995 we're saying to parents: 'We don't think those reading tests are such good measures of achievement. They are inadequate indicators. We really should use other indicators. We want to know not only how well kids can test but whether they actually read books. Do they ever pick up a book? That's important.' And parents are saying to us: 'Wait a minute! You told us that these reading tests were important. Now you're telling us they're not important? We don't believe you.' So to some extent it's an issue of trust; it's an issue of public confidence in the professional educator. I don't think we have done very much to help. Most parents feel, at least in the States, that their education was pretty lousy, so that's what they expect for their kids. So if their kid is coming home and saying 'Gee, school is fun!' parents think there must be something wrong. School was never fun for them.

We are just now starting to look at the whole issue of 'value added'. It is significant because you have to find out where kids were at the beginning, and I don't mean just around issues of attendance and reading scores. I mean you really need to interview kids to find out the attitudes they have about themselves, what they see as their educational future. That is really important because if we're looking at whether these schools - my school - have had any real impact on kids, then that's a very important part of it. We haven't done enough of this yet.

Appendix 1

THE PRINCIPLES OF THE COALITION OF ESSENTIAL SCHOOLS

1. The school should focus on helping adolescents learn to use their minds well. Schools should not attempt to be "comprehensive" if such a claim is made at the expense of the school's central intellectual purpose.

2. The school's goals should be simple: that each student master a limited number of essential skills and areas of knowledge. While these skills and areas will, to varying degrees, reflect the traditional academic disciplines, the program's design should be shaped by the intellectual and imaginative powers and competencies that students need, rather than necessarily by "subjects" as conventionally defined. The aphorism "Less Is More" should dominate: curricular decisions should be guided by the aim of thorough student mastery and achievement rather than by an effort merely to cover content.

3. The school's goals should apply to all students, while the means to these goals will vary as those students themselves vary. School practice should be tailor-made to meet the needs of every group or class of adolescents.

4. Teaching and learning should be personalized to the maximum feasible extent. Efforts should be directed toward a goal that no teacher have direct responsibility for more than 80 students. To capitalize on this personalization, decisions about the details of the course of study, the use of students' and teachers' time and the choice of teaching materials and specific pedagogies must be unreservedly placed in the hands of the principal and staff.

5. The governing practical metaphor of the school should be student-as-worker rather than the more familiar metaphor of teacher-as-deliverer-of-instructional-services. Accordingly, a prominent pedagogy will be coaching, to provoke students to learn how to learn and thus to teach themselves.

6. Students entering secondary school studies are those who can show competence in language and elementary mathematics. Students of traditional high school age but not yet at appropriate levels of competence to enter secondary school studies will be provided intensive remedial work to assist them quickly to meet these standards. The diploma should be awarded upon a successful final demonstration of mastery for graduation - an "Exhibition." This Exhibition by the student of his or her grasp of the central skills and knowledge of the school's program may be jointly administered by the faculty and by higher authorities. As the diploma is awarded when earned, the school's program proceeds with no strict age grading and with no system of "credits earned" by "time spent" in class. The emphasis is on the students' demonstration that they can do important things.

7. The tone of the school should explicitly and self-consciously stress values of unanxious expectation ("I won't threaten you but I expect much of you"), of trust (until abused) and of decency (the values of fairness, generosity and tolerance). Incentives appropriate to the school's particular students and teachers should be emphasized, and parents should be treated as essential collaborators.

8. The principal and teachers should perceive themselves as generalists first (teachers and scholars in general education) and specialists second (experts in but one particular discipline).

Staff should expect multiple obligations (teacher-counselor-manager) and a sense of commitment to the entire school.

9. Ultimate administrative and budget targets should include, in addition to total student loads per teacher of eighty or fewer pupils, substantial time for collective planning by teachers, competitive salaries for staff and an ultimate per pupil cost not to exceed that at traditional schools by more than 10 per cent. To accomplish this, administrative plans may have to show the phased reduction or elimination of some services now provided students in many traditional comprehensive secondary schools.

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Appendix 2

PRINCIPLES OF THE CENTER FOR COLLABORATIVE EDUCATION

1. Purposes

The school should focus on helping young people learn to use their minds well. Schools should not attempt to be 'comprehensive' if such attempt is made at the expense of the school's central intellectual purpose. To this end, each school needs to clarify the essential skills, areas of knowledge and habits of mind that it believes to be central to developing well-educated members of society.

2. Academic Standards

Teaching and learning are personalised, but the general course of study should be unified and universal. While the school's goals should apply to all students, the means to these goals will vary as the students themselves vary. High expectations must be held for all. All students, not just some, should be expected to grapple with important issues, be able to participate fully in the larger community as citizens and workers, have the skills and competencies to hold useful and decently-paid employment and to live satisfying personal lives.

3. Curriculum

Three principles guide the curriculum: 1. that the curriculum should respect the inter-disciplinary nature of human activity; 2. that the curriculum should respect the diverse heritages that encompass the society in which our students live and must respond to; and 3. that the curriculum be mindful of the concept that 'less is more' - that it is better to know well a few important ideas/topics than to cover many superficially.

4. Size/Personalization

In order to educate effectively, teachers must know their students' and their colleagues' work. Furthermore, the level of staff governance necessary to developing a CCE/CES plan requires a community small enough to meet easily and talk together. Therefore, no high-school teacher should be expected to deal with more than 80 students a year. Each student should be known well by one faculty member who is responsible for no more than 30 students. No school (or independently organized sub-school) should have more than 500 students. And so that they can get to know each other well, learning should be organized so that students and adults remain together in considerably smaller communities over several years.

5. Student as Worker/Student as Citizen

Learning is not a spectator sport! The student must actively participate in his/her own learning. *Student-as-worker and teacher-as-coach and mentor* is the guiding metaphor. Students must also - in collaboration with their teachers and families - be active in creating the school's tone, standards and quality of life. A school should be a living example of communal responsibility. Students, staff and families should have ways to contribute actively to the well-being of their school and the larger community.

6. Assessment

Students should be evaluated on the basis of what they are able to do, not on hours spent in classes or credits earned. Performance assessment should be as direct and authentic as possible. Thus indirect and normative testing should be replaced, as soon and as far as possible, by alternative performance-based assessment methods. Graduation from elementary

school and high school should be based on demonstrated mastery over clearly stated competencies related to the school's general plan of education.

7. Tone/Values

The tone of the school should explicitly and consciously stress values of unanxious expectation ('I won't threaten you but I expect much of you'), of trust (until abused) and of decency (the values of fairness, generosity and tolerance).

8. Families

Families must be able to impact school policies and decisions, both as they affect their own children and the entire school community. The development of mutual respect and trust between staff and families is very necessary to the education of students.

9. Decision-Making

The people who implement policies should have maximum feasible voice in the design of these policies. Therefore, the internal life of such learning communities must provide the teaching staff with power and responsibility to govern its own practices, select its own teacher-leaders and participate in all those decisions that affect their working success. This must include, however, collaboration among all those affected - particularly students and their families.

10. Diversity

Each school and classroom should represent as fully as possible the range of racial, ethnic and economic backgrounds as well as the range of academic competencies of New York's school children. Efforts should also be made to build a racially and ethnically mixed staff.

11. Choice

A school community is best served by participants who are voluntarily committed to it. Every effort should be made to ensure that no one need be a member of a CCE school community against his/her wishes. Such should not, however, operate as a vehicle for creating inequities or elitism.

12. Budget

In addition to decreased student loads for each teacher, administrative and budget targets should also include: substantial time for collective planning by teachers, competitive salaries for staff and a per pupil cost not to exceed that at traditional schools by more than 10%. In the case of high schools this may require phased reduction or elimination of some activities that many traditional high schools now provide.

Human Scale Education

Human Scale Education **is a national charity committed to the promotion of small scale structures in education believing that they are fundamental to good learning and good teaching.**

As we move towards the 21st century we need an increasingly diverse education system which meets the needs of individual children as well as the needs of different communities within a pluralistic society. *Human Scale Education* is encouraging new initiatives and experiments which are responsive to these needs.

We are working to:

- **encourage large schools to restructure into smaller units**
- **help teachers to offer young people a more personal experience of education**
- **advise and support groups of parents and/or teachers who wish to set up a small school**
- **inform policy makers of the benefits of small scale structures**
- **disseminate information about small schools and good human scale practice in Europe and the US**

Human Scale Education **is also actively involved in:**

The Third Sector Schools Alliance **which campaigns on behalf of a diverse group of small, independently founded schools which wish to be part of the state system.**

The European Forum for Freedom in Education **which encourages innovation and diversity in 30 European countries.**

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